

Washington, DC (June 7, 2012) – On Thursday, the House Foreign Affairs Committee approved a resolution introduced by Rep. Gus Bilirakis (FL-09), a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Co-Chair of the House Hellenic Caucus and member of the International Religious Freedom Caucus, calling on the Turkish parliament to allow the Theological School of Halki to reopen with no preconditions or delay.

"It is time that the Theological School at Halki is immediately reopened with no preconditions," Bilirakis said. "What the Orthodox Christian community and all religious freedom watchdogs throughout the world are asking for is simply that Turkey abides by its constitution, which secures religious rights for all of its citizens and institutions."

The Theological School of Halki is an institution of the Ecumenical Patriarchate – the center for the world's 300 million Orthodox Christians. The seminary had been the premier location for training Eastern Orthodox clergy for nearly 150 years, however, Turkish authorities forcibly shut down the seminary in 1971. The resolution simply requires that Turkey allow its citizens and institutions to be free of harassment based on religion.

The Theological School of Halki served to teach Orthodox Christian religious leaders from around the world and served as the 2,000-year-old Sacred See of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's principal seminary. The Ecumenical Patriarchate is the spiritual home of the world's oldest and second largest Christian church.